

Claims:

1. In a communications system comprising a server on a network, means for connecting the server to at least one computer in a remote customer premises, a help channel and a call centre connected to the help channel connectable through the public switched telephone network to a telephone in the customer premises, a method for the customer to obtain help in relation to a page from the server displayed by the computer comprising the steps:
 - a) the customer selecting a remote help option from the page;
 - b) the customer preparing a help request form comprising the number of the customer's telephone;
 - c) the system transferring the help request to the call centre; and
 - d) the call centre setting up a call over the public switched telephone network between the customer telephone and the help channel.
2. The method according to claim 1 in which the call centre maintains a list of calls to be placed, and places the calls in the order in which the help requests were received.
3. The method according to claim 2 in which an outbound dialing system automatically maintains the list and places the calls.
4. The method according to claim 1 in which the help channel is a live agent workstation comprising a computer and telephone.
5. The method according to claim 1 in which the help channel is an interactive voice response system.

6. The method according to claim 4 wherein the request form further comprises a URL (Uniform Resource Locator) indicating the page from which the customer has requested help and further comprising the step of the call centre passing the URL to the live help agent workstation and setting up the live agent computer at the page indicated by the URL.
7. The method according to claim 1 wherein the request form further comprises a field for filling in a customer preferred time for call-back and wherein the call centre attempts to set up the call at the customer preferred time for call-back.
8. The method according to claim 1 wherein the help request is transferred from the customer computer to the call centre through TCP/IP HTTP or E-mail.
9. The method according to claim 4 wherein a message is sent back to the customer with an anticipated wait time when no live agent is available for immediate help.
10. The method according to claim 1 wherein the server is a WWW (World Wide Web) server.
11. The method according to claim 1 wherein the step of the customer preparing a help request form is done automatically by the customer computer, with a set of default values being filled in.
12. In a communications system comprising a server on a network, means for connecting the server to at least one computer in a remote customer premises, a help channel and a call centre connected to the help channel connectable through the information network to the computer, a method for the customer to obtain help in relation to a page from the server displayed by the computer comprising the steps:
 - a) the customer selecting a remote help option from the page;

b) the customer computer automatically preparing a help request form comprising a network address;

c) the system automatically transferring the help request to the call centre; and

d) the call centre setting up a virtual audio channel on the data network between the channel and the customer computer.

13. The method of claim 12 in which the multimedia server is a WWW server, and in which the network address is an Internet Protocol address.

14. In a communications system comprising a server on a network, means for connecting the server to at least one of either a computer or a set-top box and television in a remote customer premises, a help channel and a call centre connected to the help channel connectable through the public switched telephone network to a telephone in the customer premises, a method for the customer to obtain help in relation to a page from the server displayed by the computer comprising the steps:

a) the customer selecting a remote help option from the page;

b) the customer set-top box or computer signalling a telephone switch to ring the customers telephone line (with a normal ring or a distinctive ring) in response to the customer selecting the help option;

c) the telephone switch dialing the call centre automatically when the customer picks up the handset; and

d) the call centre transferring the call to the help channel.

15. The method according to claim 14 in which the help channel is a live agent workstation comprising a computer and telephone, wherein the agent's computer is also provided with customer relevant information through the use of a caller identification system to identify the customer's telephone number which is then used to query a customer database for the customer relevant information.

16. The method according to claim 15 in which the agent is further provided with a URL indicating from which page the customer has requested help and with which the agent can set up the agent computer at the same page.

17. The method according to claim 16 in which the URL is provided to the agent by the step of the server sensing which URL is being read from all customer connections, and performing a look-up into a database to determine corresponding CLIDs, and correlating CLIDs as they come in with the URL.

18. The method according to claim 14 in which the server is a WWW server.

19. In a communications system comprising a server on a network, means for connecting the server to at least one computer in a remote customer premises, a help channel and a call centre connected to the help channel connectable through the public switched telephone network to a telephone in the customer premises, a method for the customer to obtain help in relation to a page from the server displayed by the computer comprising the steps:

- a) the customer selecting a remote help option from the page;
 - b) the customer computer automatically passing a help phone number listed within the page to communications software running on the customer's computer; and
 - c) the communications software dialing the help phone number with a modem and line connected to the customer's computer and telephone;
- whereby a voice connection is established between the customer telephone and the help channel.

20. The method according to claim 19 in which the help channel is a live agent workstation comprising a computer and telephone, wherein the agent's computer is also provided with customer relevant information through the use of a caller identification

system to identify the customer's telephone number which is then used to query a customer database for the customer relevant information.

21. The method according to claim 20 in which the agent is further provided with a URL indicating from which page the customer has requested help and with which the agent can set up the agent computer at the same page.

22. The method according to claim 21 in which the URL is provided to the agent by the step of the server sensing which URL is being read from all customer connections, and performing a look-up into a database to determine corresponding CLIDs, and correlating CLIDs as they come in with the URL.

23. The method according to claim 19 in which the server is a WWW server.

24. The method according to claim 19 in which the help channel is an IVR system.

25. In a communications system comprising a server on a network, means for connecting the server to at least one computer equipped with an SVD (simultaneous voice data) modem in a remote customer premises, a help channel comprising a live agent workstation equipped with at least one computer equipped with an SVD modem, and a call centre connected to the help channel, a method for the customer to obtain help in relation to a page from the server displayed by the computer comprising the steps:

- a) establishing a voice connection between a customer telephone and an agent telephone over the PSTN;
- b) the agent connecting the agent computer to the server if not already connected;
- c) the customer disconnecting the customer computer from the server if connected unless equipped to handle more than one connection;
- d) both the customer and ACD agent activating their SVD (Simultaneous Voice Data) Modems (or ISDN units) such that data and voice connections are established where

previously only a voice connection existed in such a way that the agent who is already connected to the desired server acts as a host and the caller acts as a remote connected to the agent's host and in communication with the host over the data portion of the connection and the caller is able to view the same pages as the agent, and the agent can provide the caller with assistance by walking the customer through the information from the server, and discuss it over the voice connection.

26. The method of claim 25 wherein the voice connection between the customer telephone and the agent telephone is established by the steps:

- a) the customer selecting a remote help option from the page;
- b) the customer preparing a help request form comprising the number of the customer's telephone;
- c) the system transferring the help request to the call centre; and
- d) the call centre setting up a call over the PSTN between the customer telephone and the help channel.

27. The method of claim 25 wherein the server is a WWW server.

28. A communications system comprising a server on a network, means for connecting the server to at least one computer in a remote customer premises, a help channel and a call centre connected to the help channel connectable through the public switched telephone network to a telephone in the customer premises, further comprising:

- a) means for the customer to browse on the computer a page provided by the server;
- b) means for the customer to select remote help on the computer;
- c) means for presenting on a screen of the computer a help request form to be completed by the customer comprising the customer's telephone number;
- d) means for transferring the help request form to the call centre;

e) means for the call centre to place calls between the help channel and the customer's telephone over the PSTN in response to the help requests.

29. The apparatus according to claim 28 wherein the help channel is a live agent workstation comprising a telephone and a computer, the apparatus further comprising means for setting up the agent's computer to view the same page from which the customer selected live help.

30. The apparatus according to claim 29 wherein the request form further comprises a field for filling in a customer preferred time for call-back and wherein the call centre further comprises means for recording the requests and associated preferred call-back times, and is adapted to place calls at specified times according to the times in the recorded requests.

31. The apparatus according to claim 29 wherein the means for transferring the request to the call centre is one of TCP/IP HTTP or E-mail.

32. A communications system comprising a server on a network, means for connecting the server to at least one computer or set-top box and television in a remote customer premises, a help channel and a call centre connected to the help channel connectable through the PSTN to a telephone having a handset in the customer premises, further comprising:

a) means for the customer to view a page of information from the server on the computer or television;

b) means for the customer to request remote help;

c) means for the customer's set-top box to signal to a telephone switch to ring the customers telephone (with a distinctive ring) whereupon the switch dials the channel automatically when the customer picks up the handset.

33. The apparatus according to claim 32 in which the server is a WWW server, the page is a WWW server page, and wherein the request form further comprises a URL indicating the WWW page from which the customer has requested help and with which the agent computer can be set up at the same WWW page.

34. A communications system comprising a server on a network, means for connecting the server to at least one computer or set-top box and television in a remote customer premises, a help channel and a call centre connected to the help channel connectable through the PSTN to a telephone having a handset in the customer premises, further comprising:

- a) means for the customer to view a page of information from the server on the computer or television;
- b) means for the customer to request live help;
- c) means for the customer computer or set-top box to signal to a telephone switch to ring a customers telephone line (with a distinctive ring) whereupon the switch dials the agent automatically when the customer picks up the handset.

35. A communications system comprising a server on a network, means for connecting the server to at least one computer or set-top box and television in a remote customer premises, a help channel and a call centre connected to the help channel connectable through the PSTN to a telephone having a handset in the customer premises, further comprising:

- a) means for the customer to view a page of information from the server on the computer or television;
- b) means for the customer to request live help;
- c) customer modem connected to both the customer telephone and the customer computer capable of making telephone calls connecting the telephone to telephone numbers provided by the computer;

d) means for the customer's computer to communicate a telephone number of a help channel provided within the page of information to the customer modem, and to initiate a telephone call over the PSTN from the modem to the call centre, thus establishing a connection between the customer's telephone and the call centre; and

e) means for the call centre to transfer the call to the help channel.

36. A communications system comprising a server on a network, means for connecting the server to at least one computer in a remote customer premises, a help agent workstation comprising a computer and telephone, and a call centre connected to the help agent work station and connectable through the public switched telephone network to a telephone and the computer in the customer premises, further comprising:

a) means for the customer to browse on the computer a page provided by the server;

b) means for the customer to select remote help on the computer;

c) means for presenting on a screen of the computer a help request form to be completed by the customer comprising the customer's telephone number;

d) means for transferring the help request form to the call centre;

e) means for the call centre to place calls between the help channel and the customer's telephone over the PSTN;

f) customer remote control software and SVD (simultaneous voice data) modem connected to the customer computer and the customer telephone;

g) agent remote control software and SVD modem connected to the agent computer and the agent telephone;

h) means for the agent computer to be connected to the server;

whereby both the caller and ACD agent may activate their SVD modems such that data and voice connections are established where previously only a voice connection existed and in such a way that the agent who is already connected to the desired server acts as a host and the caller acts as a remote connected to the agent's host and in communication with the host over the data portion of the connection and the caller is able to view the identical pages as

the agent, and the agent can provide the caller with assistance by walking the customer through the information from the server, and discuss it over the voice connection.